

*Pedagogy, Praxis and Purpose in Education*. By C.M., D.E. and D.G. Mulcahy. Pp 200 + x. New York and London: Routledge. 2015. £95 (hbk) ISBN 9780415724456.

*Pedagogy, Praxis and Purpose in Education* by C.M., D.E. and D.G. Mulcahy provides a clear and concise elaboration of three intersecting discourses they see as prevalent in education, 'the discourse of control, the discourse of knowledge and understanding, and the discourse of practice' (2). The first of these discourses, explored primarily across the first two chapters, is read in the context of educational policy. The Mulcahy's provide a neatly packaged and convincing argument for the how educational policy has been significantly influenced by a small number of private foundations, which they 'name and shame.' Chester Finn and support for him offered by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute come under particularly sharp attack for their role in influencing and perpetuating what the Mulcahy's see as 'the educational orthodoxy of our day' (26). This orthodoxy manifests itself in policies they argue are 'culturally insensitive, authoritarian and bureaucratic, dismissive towards teachers and the profession of teaching, and lack in both satisfactory justification and even clear explanation' (48). Diane Ravitch's recently revised position on educational policy and practice becomes one of main reference points in framing the book. Despite the Mulcahy's fervent critique of her earlier work - including her association with Finn and the Fordham institute - they claim that 'she has become perhaps the strongest and most sustained critic of policies of control, privatization, and profiteering in education as these are played out relative to standardized testing, administration of schools, school funding, and the evaluation of teachers' (25).

After their opening salvo, ostensibly in support of what they read as Ravitch's critique, the Mulcahy's set to work at outlining an alternative model for educational policy and practice based more firmly in practice-inflected discourse of knowledge and understanding rather than that of control. However, despite their argument that 'the discourse of knowledge and understanding generally draws on strong philosophical underpinnings' (54), theirs is problematically so. Their argument is based on strong philosophical themes, however these are not critiqued or put into question. The Mulcahy's give a broad overview of liberal philosophies of education, locating how and where they fall short in terms of their (non-)thinking on praxis. In particular, they laud Martha Nussbaum with being the proponent of liberal education coming 'closest to the discourse of praxis' (67). However, both of their investigations - the first into the discourse of control, the second into the discourse of knowledge and understanding - seem to be sleights of hand. The book only engages with these discourses so that they can be illustrated as being insufficient to what is clearly conceived of as the only really useful and 'authentic' educational discourse: the discourse of practice, by which they mean Freirean critical pedagogy (138; 144-145; 151; 160; 166; 172). The discourse of knowledge and understanding does ultimately survive their critique, but only as a facilitator of praxis, only as a Freirean critical pedagogy dedicated to 'make all more fully human' (176).

The final section gives another, even more explicitly laudatory account, this time of progressive education and critical pedagogy. Ira Shor and Linda Rief are presented as the strongest contemporary allies of these principles, which is helpful in further outlining a context for the

Mulcahy's contemporary implementation of Freire. However, on the other side of it, the only example of acknowledging criticisms levelled against Freire are passed over with references pointing only to where these critiques are claimed to have been successfully rejected (138-139). Ultimately the argument seems to be that Freirean critical pedagogy is the answer to our contemporary educational ills by making us 'more fully human.' The problematic philosophical question of what exactly it might mean to *be* human – let alone *more fully* human – is not explored at all. Nor is the equally problematic assertion of an 'authentic' education. Leaving aside the vast amount of work that has been done to problematize critical pedagogy (which the Mulcahy's never engage with) it is unclear why an argument in support of Freirean critical pedagogy is any more useful or valid than it has been for the last fifty years. As such, this is a book that seems out of step with much else in contemporary academic discourse in education. Their critiques of contemporary educational policy and practice are rigorous and effective, as are their critiques of the various forms of liberal education they disagree with. But it is their response to the problems that they locate in these discourses which requires more thorough philosophical elaboration and justification. Sometimes books are out of step in such a way as to offer something completely unexpected and unprecedented in educational thought. Unfortunately this is not the case for *Pedagogy, Praxis and Purpose in Education*, which instead reprises a commonly held position in critical pedagogy, which is no more or less convincing in its repetition.